

LEFT: Greg Johnson of the Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technology Division in Indianhead and daughter Reagan, 4, decide which bike they would like to win in the Deployed Family Fun Day raffle Saturday at Burba Lake.



PHOTO BY MELANIE S. CASEY

BELOW: Actress Kerri Kenny-Silver (left), who portrays Deputy Trudy Wiegman on the hit TV show "Reno 911!" visits with Davina Boyer and her daughter Halle, 3, during the USO-Metro's Deployed Family Fun Day. Kenny-Silver and several of her cast mates attended the event to show their support of Soldiers and their families.



PHOTO BY MELANIE S. CASEY

Family Fun Day offers activities, resources, support

By Melanie Casey
Acting Editor

The scene was more typical of a Hollywood party than a family event at Burba Lake.

But on Saturday afternoon, children and adults alike stood in line for autographs and pictures of Cartoon Network animators and several cast members from the hit Comedy Channel cable show, "Reno 911!"

"It's amazing," 17-year-old Hailey Devens said. "It's the coolest thing at Fort Meade in a long time."

The celebrity visit was a highlight of the second annual Deployed

Family Fun Day, a free event which featured activities, games, and resource tables as well as hamburgers, hot dogs, pizza and ice cream.

"[It provided] a great opportunity for the community to come together and show support for deployed service members, meet other people in the same boat and network," Installation Commander Col. Kenneth O. McCredy said. "We hope to continue these types of events."

The event was sponsored by the USO of Metropolitan Washington and coordinated by the Metropolitan Military Information Exchange.

"The USO has always done the right thing by families," said Command Sgt. Maj. Jettie Muller of Headquarters Command Battalion, who attended with her son Justin, 17. "It's a classic example of taking care of Soldiers."

The first Deployed Family Fun Day — held last September at the Telecommunications and Information Systems Command at Ft. Belvoir, Va. — was initially designed just for spouses of deployed service members. This year's event expanded to include active service members and their families, said Carla Moss, Information and Referral manager at Army Community Service in Fort Myer, Va.

The goal of Deployed Family Fun Day was to provide assistance and offer resources to families who otherwise wouldn't know about them, Moss said. She noted that the different services have an ongoing partnership — the MMIX — to ensure that information about classes, events and resources is adequately shared. "What the Army doesn't know, the Navy might," Moss said. "We're working together."

Each service brought something to the table, Moss added, by providing free resources for the event. "We're coming to them," she said, "so families can get the help they need."

Despite the threat of thunderstorms and tornadoes, hundreds of service members and their families participated.

"I try to keep the kids busy," said Stasha Arocha, mother to Jordan, 6, and Ethan, 1, as she waited out the rain in the Burba Lake Lodge. Arocha's husband deployed to Osan Air Base in Korea three weeks ago and will be away for a year. "The event was really good for the kids to keep their mind off what's really going on," she said.

The day was designed for families. With face painting, moon buns, sand art tables, games and laser tag, the youngest guests stayed busy despite the weather.

In addition to "Reno 911!" cast members, who were dressed in character, actress Candi Milo and Cartoon Network animators Joe Murray, creator of "Rocko's Modern Life," and Tom Warburton also attended.

Kerri Kenny-Silver, who portrays Deputy Trudy Wiegman in "Reno 911!" said she is "absolutely in awe of these people — kids, Soldiers. I almost feel embarrassed. If we

can bring one tiny bit of joy from our silly little show, it's an honor."

Hot dogs, hamburgers, chips and sodas were provided by the USO-Metro's Uno's Pizza and Edy's Ice Cream donated goodies as well.

Resource tables inside the Burba Lake Lodge were loaded with information provided by such agencies as the USO-Metro; Fort Meade and Fort Myer Army Community Service; Bolling Air Force Base Airman and Family Readiness Center; Fort Meade and Anacostia Fleet and Family Support; and Operation Military Kids.

Information ranged from drug and alcohol abuse awareness to parenting information and mobilization and deployment readiness.



PHOTO BY MELANIE S. CASEY

Kyla Hox, 4, slips down a huge inflatable slide during the Deployed Family Fun Day held Saturday at Burba Lake. Kyla and the other children in attendance had ample opportunities for fun with sand art, games, face painting and moon buns available during the event.

<http://www.ftmeadeusdoff.com>

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In addition to participants from the Fort Meade community, several military families from across the Washington, D.C., area attended.

Kim Desantos, whose husband, Lt. Cdr. David Desantos, an intensive care unit nurse at National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda deployed to Kuwait, brought their two children and a friend. Daughter Megan, 8, created a computer-generated card for her dad, courtesy of the Mobile Technology Lab provided by Operation Military Kids.

"It is nice to see a lot of people who don't see us as a family left behind," Desantos said. "The kids feel that. We wanted to bring them here and show them that someone really appreciates them."

"It's wonderful and gives the kids something to do," said Angela Ford, whose husband, Airman 1st Class Nathan Ford, is a firefighter with the 316th Civil Engineering Squadron on Andrews Air Force Base and is deployed to Qatar for the next three months. "And it's nice to be around other families." Several hundred service members are deployed from Fort Meade, said Sharon Collins, Fort Meade ACS Mobilization and Deployment Program coordinator and Hearts Apart Deployment Support Group leader. If the National Guard and Reserve are included, she said, that number could easily climb to 2,000.

"We wanted to get families from the Metro district together so families could network, get to put a face with a name and learn what's available," Collins said.

Lisa Redmond, Fort Meade Parent Support Program manager, distributed fliers about joining the Empowerment in the Midst of Deployment, a weekly support group for spouses of deployed service members who have children. "Any information that is going to educate [participants] about the availability of resources is important," Redmond said. "They'll manage and adjust during separation better. It's invaluable."

Preliminary plans are in place to begin holding a Deployed Family Fun Day twice a year, Moss said.

Celebrities inspired, honored

The celebrities on hand said they were honored to be a part of the event. In addition to Kenny-Silver, attending courtesy of the USO-Metro were Carlos Alazraqui, Tom Lennon, Ben Garant, Neve Nash and Cedric Yarbrough of "Reno 911!"

The day prior to Deployed Family Fun Day, the cast had visited wounded service members at Walter Reed Army Medical Center and National Naval Medical Center. They planned to visit Quantico Marine Corps Base in Virginia the day after the event.

"When you watch war on TV — politicians, policies being made — it's very different," said Yarbrough, who plays Deputy S. Jones on the show. "To have a face-to-face meeting is really inspirational. It actually made me feel better. Amazing and inspiring. I'm thankful and glad to be here."



PHOTO BY MELANIE S. CASEY

Rebecca Julka, 5, (center) watches her friend Megan Desantos, 8, make a computer-generated card at the Mobile Technology Lab provided by Operation Military Kids during Deployed Family Fun Day. Megan's father is deployed to Kuwait.

"It's incredibly inspiring," said Lennon, who portrays Lt. James Dangle. "The spirit of the young men and women we met — people who had every reason not to have a good attitude. I've never seen a more upbeat, motivated group — ever... And the prosthetics they have [at Walter Reed], I've never seen anything like it, even in Hollywood."

"It's the other side of being a celebrity, other than the red carpets and the parties. [This side] is so much more gratifying. If you can use your celebrity on the show, it's a blessing," said Nash — aka Deputy Kaineisha Williams. Visiting wounded service members "brings the war home, makes it personal," said Alazraqui, who plays Officer James Garcia on "Reno 911!" and also voices several cartoon characters. "[One can] appreciate the sacrifice these young men and women make. It hits you when you get home. I'm thankful for their service and glad we have people who have this courage."

For more information about the Hearts Apart Deployment Support Group, call Army Community Service at 301-677-5590. For more information about the Parent Support Program, call Lisa Redmond at 301-677-3617.

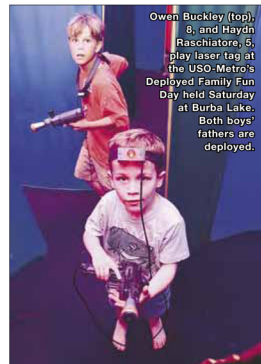


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